

**Testimony of
Benjamin Blake, Mayor
City of Milford**

Housing Committee

RE: HB 5363, "AN ACT CONCERNING THE AFFORDABLE HOUSING LAND USE APPEALS PROCEDURE."

On behalf of the City of Milford, thank you for this opportunity to provide comments concerning your Committee's proposed legislation.

While I applaud any attempt to improve the underlying law, and while the Committee's proposal is well intentioned, this bill falls short of addressing the challenges municipalities like Milford face under CGS Sec. 8-30(g). The original intent of 8-30(g) - to assist low to moderate income persons who wish to reside in, and be part of, a community otherwise not affordable - has been lost. Instead, Connecticut residents - low, moderate and high income - are punished by the unintended consequences of the well-intentioned legislation. Developers are circumventing carefully crafted, purposeful local zoning regulations and cramming inappropriate complexes and units into neighborhoods and subdivisions where they just don't fit. These same developers are not considering the best interests of the community, nor are they considering the needs of the State's residents.

Why is a community like Milford a target? Simply this - we have done well by our residents. We have a steady job market, an enviable sewer system, a well-connected multi-modal transit system and a highly regarded education system. We have numerous affordable apartments, many well-below the financial qualification threshold identified by statute. Nonetheless, Milford is a mature community with developments going back to 1639, and many of our affordable properties pre-date zoning and housing laws which require a deed-restriction in order to be officially considered "affordable" under current law. This artificial statutory condition creates an uneven playing field making it difficult for certain Connecticut communities to qualify for a moratorium or exemption under 8-30(g).

In order to bring greater consistency and fairness to the process, we require a more equitable test for affordable housing in Connecticut, a test that relies less on out-dated formulas and more heavily upon timely facts and relevant data. For example, current HUD and Census Bureau data show that in Milford, the overall level of low and moderate-income households is 32.72% - a figure that clearly demonstrates Milford is exceeding all benchmarks in the promotion of local affordability.

Let's breakdown the numbers: in Milford, a moratorium under CGS Sec. 8-30(g) requires 2% or approximately 461 points of restricted housing stock, while an exemption would involve 10% or approximately 2300 units dedicated to low to moderate-income residents. If we assume the number of persons living in the approximate 2300 documented affordable units in Milford ranges from one to four, then that would amount to a minimum of 2300 and a maximum of 9200 low to moderate income residents living in our city. We also know, based on HUD and Census data, that approximately 33% of current Milford residents, over 17,000 individuals, are low to

moderate-income. Given this reality, Milford not only meets the affordability target intended by the underlying legislation, we blow it out of the water. Unfortunately, Milford does not receive the proper credit for fulfilling the spirit CGS Sec. 8-30(g), and we continue to be plagued by the statute's technicalities.

In light of the above, I respectfully ask this Committee to consider four additional ways this statute might be amended to better meet the needs of communities like Milford:

1. The standard for moratorium and exemption qualification should be identical.
2. Family units and elderly units should be awarded the same points.
3. Developers should be subject to local zoning regulations regardless of affordability.
4. Open land in a municipality, or more importantly the lack thereof, should be taken into account when applying a minimum percentage requirement to the affordable housing stock (quite frankly, Milford does not have the land which may be available in other Connecticut municipalities, and this blanket minimum percentage places our City at a great disadvantage).

Again, thank you for your courtesy and consideration. I appreciate the good work of this Committee and I am especially grateful to those members, including Chairman Butler, who have recently visited with us in Milford and witnessed, firsthand, the impressive affordable housing stock that presently exists in our City. I urge you to continue your work of improving our housing laws to ensure that each Connecticut town has the necessary tools to develop into a world-class community. I stand ready to assist you in your noble efforts.